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SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA AND USOAS

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SUBJECT: UNDERSECRETARY BURN'S DECEMBER 20 VISIT TO HAITI

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Timothy M. Carney for Reasons: 1.4 (b) and d)

11. Summary: In Haiti December 20, Undersecretary of State Burns encouraged the Interim Government of Haiti (IGOH) and others to abide by the electoral calendar and conduct the first round on January 8. The Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) Director General noted the only way voters could know where to vote would be to retrieve their national card or to have their registration receipts annotated. The PM agreed to wait one week to assess the OAS' progress in card distribution before declaring a delay in the elections. In a separate meeting, SRSG Valdes committed to support January 8 as the first round of elections, but explained the U.S. and MINUSTAH would have to pressure the OAS to distribute more cards. OAS Ambassador Denneth Modeste said he was "hopeful" all the cards would be distributed and asserted the remaining challenges include a lack of publicity and Haitians' willingness to retrieve their national identification cards.
End Summary.

Morning Meeting with PM and CEP Leadership

12. (C) U/S Burns met with interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue and Director General of the CEP Jacques Bernard. CEP President Max Mathurin later joined the meeting. The PM discussed OAS Secretary Insulza's optimistic view that elections could be held January 8 (Insulza was in Haiti December 17-18 to attend a mass dedicated to national dialogue). The PM explained that all entities responsible for carrying out the elections: the IGOH, MINUSTAH, CEP and OAS, met December 19. The OAS reaffirmed then it could distribute all 3.5 million national identification cards by the end of the year and all agreed to overcome the remaining hurdles to conduct the elections on January 8 as planned. CEP DG Bernard noted to U/S Burns that the only way voters could know where to vote would be to retrieve their national card or get their registration receipt annotated, essentially the same process. MINUSTAH, DG Bernard, and CEP president Mathurin believe the OAS would fail to accomplish this task and this led, according to the PM, to SRSG Valdes' recommendation to postpone the date until cards are completely distributed. The PM concluded that assessing OAS card distribution after another week is likely the best course.

13. (C) U/S Burns countered that the IGOH had made substantial progress to date in organizing the elections and that it is important to stay the course to conduct them on the scheduled dates. U/S Burns recommended Haitians be allowed to use their registration receipts to vote and encouraged continued cooperation between the parties responsible for successful elections. U/S Burns noted that Haiti's international reputation would be affected if elections are postponed. U/S Burns agreed to the PM's request to join a second meeting in the presence of MINUSTAH, OAS, and the CEP DG.

14. (SBU) U/S Burns also raised the prolonged detentions of former prime minister Yvon Neptune and of Father Jean-Juste, urging a swift and impartial resolution to their cases. The PM said that appeals bear on both cases, but Jean-Juste is to be tried on misdemeanor charges, and the decision rests with the judges. Pushed on when Jean-Juste's case could be expected to be resolved, the PM replied "immediately after January."

Meeting with Civil Society

15. (SBU) During a lunch with members of Haiti's civil society, business community, and two non-governmental organizations, U/S Burns heard views centering on elections, the interim government, and security. Most underscored that the next elected government would be another transitional government, and characterized the IGOH as a failure. All expressed a need for social cohesion via national dialogue. Others cited the need for more investment towards job creation. The participants were split on delaying the elections, but all voiced concern that the level of insecurity, particularly the increase in kidnappings, could affect the elections. One demanded the U.S., MINUSTAH and

Haitian National Police (HNP) make a strong statement against violence.

Meeting with SRSG Valdes

16. (C) U/S Burns and his delegation, joined by SOUTHCOP General Craddock, met briefly with SRSG Valdes and MINUSTAH elections coordinator Gerardo LeChevallier before meeting a second time with the Prime Minister. U/S Burns offered his condolences on that morning's death of a retired Canadian police officer assisting with electoral security (septel). Turning to elections, Valdes said the main challenge is telling people where to vote, and said all other obstacles could easily be overcome. Valdes committed to support January 8 as the first round of elections, but explained the U.S. and MINUSTAH would have to pressure the OAS to distribute more cards.

Afternoon Meeting with PM, MINUSTAH, OAS, CEP, and HNP

17. (C) The PM opined that the largest obstacle to holding elections January 8 is skepticism that it can be done. U/S Burns, noting there is never going to be a perfect time to have elections, reiterated the U.S. position that a collective effort must be undertaken to see elections through on January 8. U/S Burns called for a massive publicity campaign to allow people to know where to vote. Gen. Craddock noted that MINUSTAH's security planning is on track.

He said MINUSTAH has taken a reasoned approach to prepare for elections and understood they face moderate risk. The PM acknowledged HNP Director General Mario Andresol's presence, and said security planning has been coordinated between MINUSTAH UNPOL and the HNP.

18. (SBU) OAS Ambassador Denneth Modeste said 3.2 million cards are in country and the remaining 300,000 would arrive no later than December 24. Modeste said 380 distribution sites are open and functioning and he was "hopeful" all the cards would be distributed by the end of the year (Note: at a December 22 Core Group meeting, the OAS representative said 1 million had been distributed to date. End Note.) Modeste said the challenge remains a lack of publicity and Haitians' willingness to retrieve their national identification cards stating "thousands are waiting to be picked up." (Note: MINUSTAH launched a public campaign, including radio and t.v. spots, December 22. End Note.) The meeting concluded with all sides agreeing to continue moving toward holding elections on January 8.

19. (C) Comment: The IGOH and the Haitian press (see P's web-site for transcript) received the P visit well. The parties responsible for holding elections are working together to accomplish as many tasks at hand to undertake elections on January 8. While doubters remain amongst them (notably LeChevallier), all are willing to wait one week to see if the OAS succeeds, or fails, in distributing most of the remaining 2 million cards during the holidays, before publicly advocating a postponement. However, CEP President Mathurin (who did not attend P's second meeting with the PM) voiced his expectation on the radio December 22 that elections could not be held by January 8. End comment.

10. (U) U/S Burns delegation included WHA A/S Shannon, S/CRS Amb. Pascual, and P Special Assistant Cynthia Echeverria. Charge and Poloff (notetaker) accompanied. SOUTHCOP Gen. Craddock joined the delegation for the afternoon meetings with MINUSTAH and the PM's electoral meeting.

11. (U) U/S Burns has cleared on this message.
CARNEY